HEALTH AND SAFETY FACTSHEET

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

Managing Work In Extreme Heat

With temperatures over 40°C (104°F) common in parts of South Australia, your employer and your supervisor need to help you keep cool and stay safe. You need to maintain a body temperature of approximately 37°C (98.6°F), and if your body has to work too hard to keep cool or starts to overheat, you will begin to suffer from a heat-related illness.

HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

Heat-related illness refers to a range of symptoms that can get worse if not managed quickly and may even be fatal. When you work in the heat, you may appear with:

- Heat rash - a rash on the skin that can become irritated and cause discomfort when working in the heat.
- Heat cramps – where muscles cramp up due to heavy sweating and a loss of salts and electrolytes.
- Dizziness - a feeling of being light headed when you stand or rise from a seated position. This feeling can occur immediately before fainting.
- Fainting – is a sudden loss of consciousness due to blood moving from the head and upper body and collects in legs.
- Heat exhaustion - occurs when the body is working too hard to stay cool. Warning signs may include dizziness, fainting, fatigue / extreme tiredness, weak but rapid pulse, muscle cramps, nausea and headache.
- Heat stroke - a medical emergency and occurs when the body can no longer cool itself. It may present as nausea, seizures, confusion, disorientation, cold and clammy skin, and sometimes coma. This can be fatal.

Some other common effects of working in heat include:

- Dehydration – from increased sweating and not drinking enough water.
- Sunburn – a type of skin burn resulting from too much sun exposure.
- Burns - can occur if you touch hot surfaces or tools that have been out in the sun.

- Slips – you will sweat more in hot conditions which can increase the risk of slips - for example, sharp tools may slip if your hands are sweaty.
- Reduced concentration - you may find it harder to concentrate or become confused and so more likely to make mistakes, such as forgetting to guard machinery.
- Increased chemical uptake into the body - heat can cause the body to absorb chemicals differently and can increase the side effects of some medications.

Whilst working in hot temperatures is the main issue, other factors may also contribute to the risk of a heat-related illness. This includes:

- amount of air movement
- amount or type of clothing
- high humidity
- increased physical activity, and
- radiant temperature of surroundings.

STEPS TO PREVENT HARM

While the risk cannot be removed, things can be done to reduce it. Some things you can do include:

- start and finish work earlier when the weather is cooler
- ask for help from another worker to do the job and finish sooner
- work in the shade as much as possible
- take extra rest breaks in a cool area, away from the heat
- wear light clothing that still protects you from the sun
- stay away from hot processes / equipment
- have plenty of cool drinking water nearby and drink a cup of water (about 200 ml) every 15 to 20 minutes to stay hydrated
- when working outdoors, wear a combination of: a wide brim hat, loose fitting long-sleeved (preferably cotton) shirt, long pants, sunglasses and sunscreen that is reapplied every 2 hours
- learn how to recognise a heat-related illness and the correct first aid to treat it, and
- take a break from work if your supervisor thinks you are showing symptoms of a heat-related illness.

It is important that you and your co-workers look out for each other and act immediately if someone appears to be affected. Prevention is the key, however, so when you are working in the heat, think about what you can do to look after yourself.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to seek advice about this factsheet, please contact SAWIA on +**61 8 8222 9277** or **admin@winesa.asn.au**

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